

# Christian-Muslim Relations 600 - 1500

## To Mār Naṣr, Letter 36

(558 words)

To Mār Naṣr, Letter 36

**Timothy (Ṭimāte'ōs), East-Syrian patriarch**

Date: Unknown, after Letter 35, probably between 785 and 789

Original Language: Syriac

### Description

Like Letter 35, this is addressed to the Christian Naṣr and is again apologetic in nature. Timothy explains that it is written against those who denigrate the majesty of Christ. He does not only mean Muslims here, but also Jews, Manicheans, Arians and Marcionites. Hurst has noted that Timothy's approach is somewhat different from that employed in his apologetic works exclusively against Islam, for here he makes use of proof texts from the Pauline epistles, which are rarely used in confrontation with Muslims. In addition, Timothy goes into the textual variants in the Greek and Syriac versions of the Hebrew Bible, not something one would expect in a discussion with Muslims, who were generally eager to point out that the text of the Bible was corrupt. It is nevertheless clear that Timothy directs part of his letter specifically against Muslim critiques of Christianity, when he mentions 'adversaries' who claim that Christ's birth from a virgin without the seed of a man is no more miraculous than Adam's birth - an argument based on Q 3:59 and used frequently by Muslims. Here Timothy contrasts Adam's genesis 'from the earth', like animals, with Christ's birth 'by divine power'. The former was a birth from an irrational, lifeless entity, while the latter was from an exalted woman chosen by God, living and rational. As in two earlier letters (34 and 35), the Patriarch concludes that Christ cannot be called 'servant'.

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Timothy also briefly discusses the *veneration* of the relics of saints and martyrs, which according to him is a way of worshipping God Himself. Against the background of Islamic criticisms, he not only defends the cult, but also asserts that it is an obligation for Christians to honor the saints.

## Significance

The letter is another example of the Patriarch Timothy's interest in apologetics. He pursues a number of themes that are meant to demonstrate the rationality of Christian doctrine to his coreligionists in terms that would help them to counter the polemic of other religious communities, including heretical Christians and Muslims.

## Manuscripts

MS Baghdad, Chaldean Monastery - 509 (formerly MS Alqosh, Notre Dame des Semences – 169) (13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> c., Letters 1-59, oldest extant MS; all other MSS derive directly or indirectly from it)

Copies of Baghdad 509:

MS Vat – Borgia Syr. 81 (shortly before 1869)

MS Vat – Syr. 605 (1874)

MS Baghdad, Chaldean Monastery - 512 (formerly MS Notre-Dame des Semences – 170) (1894)

MS BL – Or. 9361 (1889)

MS Mingana – Syr. 587 (1932)

Copies of Baghdad 512:

MS Trichur, Archiepiscopal library (catalogue no. unknown; 1897; Letters 3-59; used by T. Darmo for his edition)

MS Church of Karamlaiss (near Mosul) – 39 (1904)

For a description of the manuscripts, including a number of lost MSS and corrections to Bidawid's inventory, see H. Cheikho, *Dialectique*, pp. 43-52.

## Editions & Translations

Darmo, *Letters of Patriarch Timothy I 778-820 A. D.*, pp. 181-210 (edition based on the Trichur MS)

Braun, *Timothei Patriarchae I epistulae*, i, pp. 238-64 (edition), ii, pp. 164-83 (trans.)

## Studies

Griffith, 'The Syriac letters of Patriarch Timothy I', pp. 126-30

Hurst, *The Syriac letters of Timothy I*, pp. 63-68 and *passim*

## Keywords

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